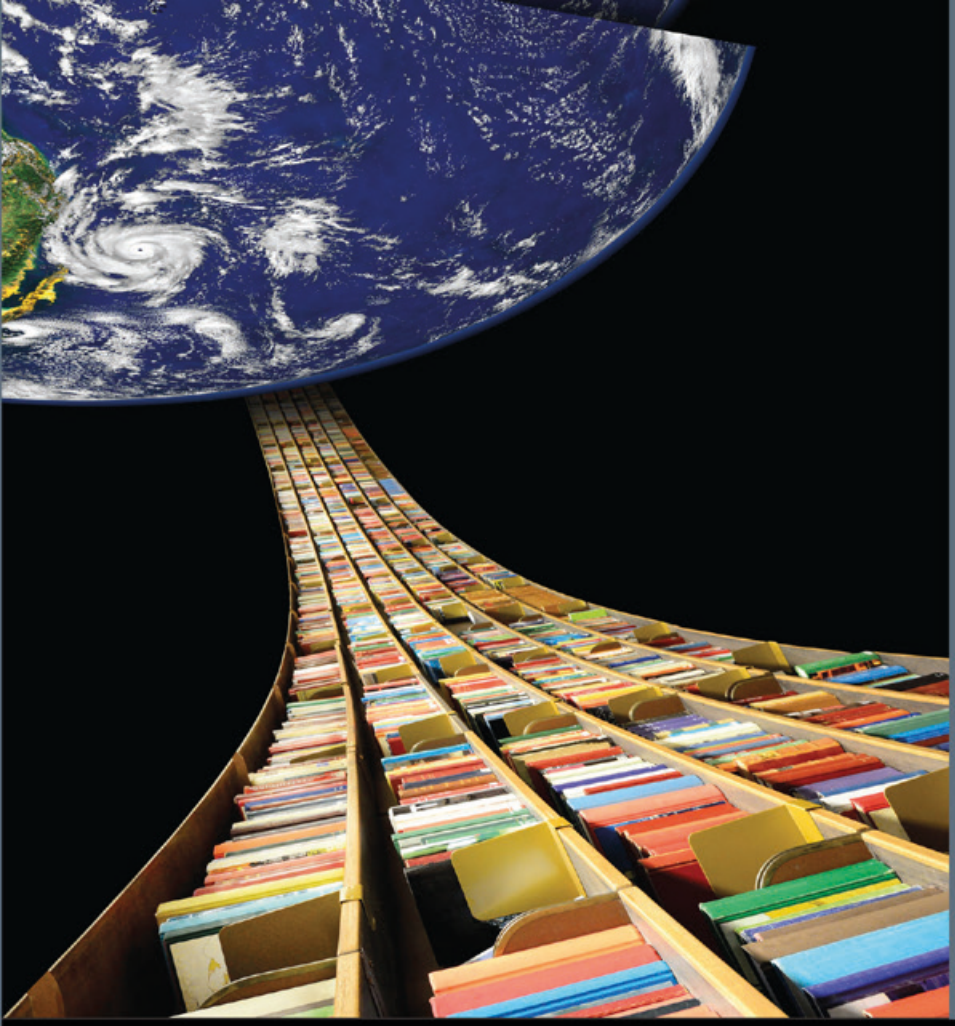
Conclusion: the future of literary manuscripts — an international perspective



Collection Development, Cultural Heritage, and Digital Humanities

THE FUTURE OF LITERARY ARCHIVES

DIASPORIC AND DISPERSED COLLECTIONS AT RISK

Edited by **DAVID C. SUTTON**
with **ANN LIVINGSTONE**

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CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF LITERARY MANUSCRIPTS—AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

DAVID C. SUTTON

Diasporic Lives and Natural Archival Homes

The chapters in this book combine a wide variety of subject matter with consistency of theme, bound together by the notion of literary archives as characteristically "diasporic." Most of the authors of the chapters participated and discussed together during the workshops of the Diasporic Literary Archives Network, so, although they did not have the opportunity to read each other's contributions as the book took shape, it is perhaps not surprising that there is a notable consistency and a natural inter-relationship between the points of view expressed in the different essays.

The essays by André Derval, Alison Donnell, Maureen Roberts, and Jennifer Toews all lay stress on the diasporic lives lived by many literary authors, especially but not exclusively in a postcolonial and post-imperialist context. Authors from poorer countries, with fewer job opportunities and a less developed publishing industry at home, often gravitated towards richer countries, when they could. Authors whose origins lie in the former colonies of the Caribbean region or North and West Africa, for example, or in the "protectorates" of the Arab countries and southern Africa, would tend to move between the countries of their birth and the countries of the colonial rulers—for economic, financial, political, and sometimes literary reasons. Many of these diasporic lives were, of necessity, quiet and cautious in the new locations in richer countries, although Maureen Roberts gives us the quite exceptional story of Eric and Jessica Huntley, who, forced out of the then British Guiana because of their political and community activism, became unrelenting political and community activists in London. In many and varied situations, the archival collections have come to reside in the new diasporic destination, in the country of wealth and power and, sometimes, safety. The attitudes of Adonis towards France, C. L. R. James and Una Marson towards Britain, and Octavio Paz towards the USA combine a keen awareness of imperialist imposition with a sense of financial, literary, and even archival necessity. The archives of Octavio Paz are in the Harry Ransom Center of the University of Texas perhaps primarily for

financial reasons whereas the archives of Adonis are in the Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine for reasons of a more geopolitical nature, but both archival placements form part of the same wider diasporic pattern.

It is typical of the nature of this pattern that Paz had no particular connection with Texas and Adonis no particular connection with Normandy. Their diasporic lives followed a separate pattern to that of their diasporic literary archives. As cartographic software becomes increasingly sophisticated, we can expect to see more research projects, into the 2020s, which will map diasporic literary lives against diasporic archival collections. In some cases the determining factors will be ideas of archival appropriateness, as expressed in the phrase "natural archival home"; in other cases the market, the auction room, and institutional wealth will pull in other directions; and serendipity, combined with the frequent separation of collecting practices from any clear collecting policy, will also play its part.

Despite our primary focus here on the diasporic, there have been plenty of examples of natural archival homes throughout the essays in this volume. One thinks of the papers of Margaret Atwood in Toronto; Honoré de Balzac and Victor Hugo in different parts of Paris; Alejo Carpentier in Havana; Charles Causley in Exeter (there being no historic university in Cornwall); Elfriede Jelinek in Vienna; Frederick Philander in Windhoek; José Saramago in Lisbon; and Roger Mais and Anthony C. Winkler in Kingston. Capturing this idea perfectly, the celebration event in Kingston on April 6, 2017 was badged as "Home at Last: the presentation of the Anthony Winkler archives to the National Library of Jamaica."

There are more and more collections worldwide finding their natural homes (at last) in this way, and it has been part of the work of the Diasporic Literary Archives Network to encourage and facilitate this development, whose impetus and appeal may derive from varied drivers ranging from patriotism to more local or regional loyalties, to a concern about patrimony and national culture, to an anti-imperialist ideological commitment. For the Network, the flagship event was the arrival of the papers of Monique Roffey at the University of the West Indies in St. Augustine, which was seen as a potential turning-point and a significant exemplar for the future (Roffey, 2016).

Daniela La Penna's comprehensive essay "Italian Archives: Legacies and Challenges" provides us with an important set of references to these emerging ideas from a proud and distinctive literary culture. The ideas of natural archival home and national patrimony are clearly present in her description of the outrage caused in Italy by the sale of Marinetti's notebooks to the Beinecke Library at Yale and some of Pirandello's manuscripts to the Houghton Library at Harvard. Although several Italian authors (notably Pasolini and Meneghello) led the sorts of diasporic lives which can be mapped against their diasporic archives, the existence of strong collecting institutions combined with a strong sense of national patrimony has led to many of the most important Italian literary manuscript collections remaining in Italy.

The Kauaria–Sutton essay on literary archives in Namibia, in looking at the international models available to Namibian archivists, describes a similar situation in

respect of literary manuscripts in Brazil, where an impressive array of collecting institutions is combined with a definite awareness of the importance of literary manuscripts to the national heritage. In both of these cases, Italy and Brazil, national collecting is helped by the fact that the international (and especially the North American) market is less competitive in respect of works written in the Italian and particularly the Portuguese language.

The UNESCO Memory of the World programme, described in the essay by Jens Boel, lays a particular emphasis on appropriateness of location, and it may be hoped that the widening scope of the programme in the future will allow it to give further support to the retention of local literary archive collections in appropriate and natural local archives repositories.

Diasporic Appropriateness

Moving on from the idea of the natural archival home, we can contrast cases of diasporic appropriateness and diasporic serendipity. The example of Ernest Hemingway and his diasporic literary life provides ways of looking at this. Had his archival destiny been one of diasporic appropriateness, his papers might have ended up in Paris and Havana, as well as Florida and Idaho. Instead, in a striking example of diasporic serendipity, the decisions taken after his death by Mrs. Hemingway and Mrs. Kennedy led to their finding a home in the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

This brings to our attention a subset of the workings of diasporic randomness, namely that which derives from the actions of surviving heirs (typically widows and/or children, occasionally widowers). The placing of the literary papers of Léopold Sédar Senghor in Paris (his political papers remaining in Dakar) and of the archive of Shiva Naipaul in London by their respective widows are typical examples. Disagreements among surviving family members will also have to be factored into this subset.

Other examples can be found, however, which clearly belong under the rubric of diasporic appropriateness—a close mapping of a diasporic life and a diasporic archive. These would include the papers of Tom Sharpe at the University of Girona (mentioned in the Introduction) or the papers of David Hawkes, held by the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Some of the Caribbean authors whose lives and whose archives ended up in London and Toronto provide further examples.

Possible Futures for Literary Archives

A question frequently put to us has been whether the work of the Diasporic Literary Archives Network indicates that literary manuscripts have an assured and certain future, whether on the contrary that future is uncertain, or even whether the age of the literary manuscript is drawing towards a close.

In early presentations on the work of the *Location Register of English Literary Manuscripts and Letters*, in fact, I several times suggested that the great age of English literary manuscripts would come to be seen as 1688–1988. That suggestion would

now have to be heavily qualified, partly because of the great increase in interest in literary manuscripts to which the authors of this volume (and many other literary archivists and scholars) have contributed.

The ongoing work of the UK Location Register itself witnessed a continuation in the creation and collection of traditional literary manuscripts well beyond 1988, and, if typewriters and hence typescripts have now almost disappeared, handwritten literary manuscripts from the second decade of the twenty-first century continue to be received by archives and libraries. Authors continue to write early drafts into notebooks; authors continue to have favourite pens and favourite papers.

More unexpectedly, the Location Register's researchers have found that for the first decade of the present century, in the UK at least, the most typical form of literary manuscript was beginning to be the computer print-out with handwritten annotations. Again the fact that these documents were finding their way into the archives, rather than the waste-bin, the recycling-bin, or the shredder, is a reflection of the good work done by a generation of literary archivists in alerting authors to the value of the earlier drafts and versions of their creative writings.

This archival continuity, decades beyond my long-ago suggested date of 1988, is comforting and encouraging, for archivists and literary researchers alike. The traditional literary manuscript, created on paper, has endured—endured much longer than archivists and scholars thirty years ago were predicting.

This means that between 1990 and 2020 we have been in a transitional or hybrid phase in the history of literary manuscripts. Although more and more authors create their works digitally, a significant part of their creative output has continued to arrive in archives in paper formats.

In addition, many literary archival deposits from living authors in the period since 2010 have themselves been hybrid—partly on paper and partly digital—and this has also provided reassurance: reassurance to the archivist that at least the paper part of the archive can be consulted easily, and reassurance to the accountant because at least the paper part of the archive can be valued with some firm points of reference.

As we approach 2020, the great uncertainty (for valuers, archivists, and scholars) concerns the future of born-digital literary archives. This was my assessment four years ago:

> One of the unresolved issues which presently adds great uncertainty to our consideration of born-digital archives is that of value. Most born-digital materials presently in archival collections have been either donated, or purchased as part of a hybrid archive with a substantial paper component, or purchased as a test-case, in this experimental mind-set. No systematic set of terms of reference for valuation of born-digital archival collections has yet been established. There is an absence, firstly of precedents and secondly of information about users and likely users. There is a natural concern that users of a costly digital manuscript collection may turn out to be very few.

> Emails are much safer to collect. In fact emails are often more revealing than collections of letters. This is both because of the typical two-way nature of email threads and because of the lack of restraint which the email format often appears to generate in its users. Emails are certain to provide a highly-valued future trove for biographers.
>
> But literary manuscripts in digital formats remain fraught with uncertainties. If the study of literary manuscripts is in large part a study of variants, versions and progress of composition, how can scholars be certain of the authenticity of the variants within digital media? And even if technology does provide such certainty (through very sophisticated hardware and software) will scholars want to use media of this sort which they cannot pick up and hold in their hands? It is widely perceived that there is little of the "magic" of paper manuscripts in digital materials, and that therefore digital study may hold less attraction, allure or prestige.
>
> Moreover, the digital literary manuscript of ten years ago is already slipping away from us. Composition on smart phones and storage in various forms of cloud present different challenges, and archivists are having to open urgent discussions about the implications of Google and Microsoft Cloud Storage and similar platforms.
>
> In 2014 the status and nature of literary manuscripts ten years hence is probably more uncertain than for any ten-year period since 1700, and the longer-term future similarly more difficult to predict. Very few specialists doubt that literary manuscripts have a fascinating and exciting future, but even fewer are prepared to forecast, between 2015 and 2025, exactly what form that future will take.
>
> Sutton, 2014

Since 2014 we have seen some important developments especially in technology (processing, storage, deep-analysis, and retrieval) but great uncertainty remains about users. Comparatively few teachers in universities appear to have developed courses with regular use of born-digital materials. By contrast, archivists in richer countries have been proactive in creating projects and activities which have attracted groups of users in special circumstances, but at the same time regular run-of-the-mill digital users remain rare. We see holders of a post which might typically be entitled "digital archivist" working hard to encourage users to come and work with them on projects, research, and digital analysis. Special events including poetry readings and celebrations of modern publishing remain more amenable to work with born-digital sources than traditional analysis of texts and versions. It seems likely that in the foreseeable future much more research based on digital materials will be archivist-mediated, and even archivist-created.

The vital importance of archivally collected emails (whether digital or printed out) to biographical and literary research is already established and certain. By contrast, the coming decade is likely to determine the future of scholarly use of born-digital original writings.

Let us move towards the conclusion of the Conclusion by looking at four key themes of the Diasporic Literary Archives Network, which will continue to dominate international discussions about the nature of literary archives. These are split collections; the ethics of acquisition; the politics of location; and the forms of displaced archives.

Split Collections

The nature and the implications of "split collections" have provided a central theme for the work of the Diasporic Literary Archives Network. It appears clear that split archival collections are a key characteristic of literary archives and literary research, and the splitting occurs for many different reasons. The reasons most important to the arguments of this Conclusion concern diasporic literary lives and the pull between the "natural archival home" and the workings of the market. A good illustrative example of this latter form of split is provided by the papers of D. H. Lawrence, which are half in the natural home in Nottingham and half in the market home in Austin, Texas. Alison Donnell's essay provides a similar example for the manuscripts of Samuel Selvon (split between Trinidad and Austin), and we might also think of the Derek Walcott papers in Trinidad and Toronto, or (less straightforwardly) the Doris Lessing papers in Norwich and Austin, Texas. A special case is provided by the papers of Samuel Beckett, with natural homes in Dublin and Paris, a market home in Austin, and a curious diasporic home in Reading, based on Beckett's own choices and friendships. Serenella Zanotti's essay describes some of the implications of a similar complexity in the locations of the papers of Anthony Burgess. An epitome of the division between the market home and the natural home is provided by the archival story, mentioned in the essay by Jennifer Toews, of Seamus Heaney, who had sold an important part of his manuscript collection to Emory University in Atlanta, but shortly before his death personally delivered, in the presence of his son, his own archival *Nachlass* to the National Library of Ireland.

The Ethics of Acquisition

In her excellent book *The Ethical Archivist*, Elena S. Davidson proposes three models of cultural property ownership: the free market model, the nationalist model, and the regulated model (Davidson, 2010). These are clear and useful distinctions, with the free market model operating in the USA, the nationalist model in China and Russia, and versions of the regulated model in most western European countries. As I have argued elsewhere, however (Sutton, 2014; Sutton, 2016), a primary consideration is always the language in which the author writes. A completely free market does not operate, even in the USA and even for Nobel Laureates such as José Saramago or Orhan Pamuk, in Portuguese language or Turkish language archives.

Nonetheless the concept of the ethics of acquisition is one which is seriously under-discussed in international archives organizations, conferences, and publications, and one which now merits much closer attention. As Davidson implies,

archivists and administrators should explain and justify their acquisition of any particular collection, in terms of ethics as well as institutional policy.

The Politics of Location

The movement of literary manuscripts from one country to another can become highly political and highly contentious. The word "outrage" recurs with surprising frequency. Alongside the examples of Marinetti and Pirandello drawn from Daniela La Penna's essay, we could refer to the furious reaction in Mexico to the purchase of the archive of Carlos Fuentes by Princeton University, described in the Introduction; the reaction in Chile to the sale of the papers of the poet Enrique Lihn to the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles; or the more restrained sense of sadness and loss in Colombia after the archive of Gabriel García Márquez was sold to the University of Texas in November 2014, when there are several splendid (but less wealthy) collecting institutions for literary manuscripts in Colombia—ranging from the Biblioteca Nacional in Bogotá to the Instituto Caro y Cuervo in Yerbabuena.

The politics of archival location becomes part of a wider consideration of cultural hegemony, and the struggles of poorer countries to assert their own cultural identity and pride. There is a need for a reassessment of policy—similar to that which has happened in recent years in the world of museums—in the very small number of countries (arguably only the USA, the UK, Canada, and France) which regularly and systematically collect the literary archives of the nationals of other countries (Sutton, 2014).

Displaced Archives, Alienated Archives, and Diasporic Archives

Moving from diasporic archives to alienated archives to displaced archives, the terminology becomes increasingly severe. "Displaced archives" are archives which have been caused to be in the wrong place, with bad consequences. An example often cited would be the administrative and governmental archives of Algeria before 1962, most of which are retained in France on the basis that Algeria was legally a part of France until 1962, a department not a colony. The use of the term "displaced" to describe these Algerian archives is strongly contested by lawyers and archivists in France, while Algerian representatives refer to the infrastructural and other projects in their country which have been made much more difficult by the absence of proper documents and plans. The situation was exacerbated by allegations emerging in 2017 that the papers were not being properly conserved or looked after.[1] Displaced archives form a significant point of discussion within postcolonial cultural politics.

The term "alienated archives" was coined by Professor Kenneth Ramchand (2016) to give a powerfully negative description of literary archives which have been removed from their natural archival home to a location with which the author had no

1 Follow "La conservation des archives rapatriées d'Algérie en 1962 est 'défaillante'" on various ephemeral blog sites.

connection. Ramchand had in mind in particular the papers of V. S. Naipaul bought by the University of Tulsa and those of Samuel Selvon which had been acquired by the University of Texas. Ramchand's sense of archival appropriateness is strong and heart-felt: "I cannot think of a better place to be than Guyana when looking at a Wilson Harris or Roy Heath manuscript" and "If I had the power I would pass legislation to the effect that the collections of certain authors are national treasures, and attach regulations about sale or lease" (Ramchand, 2016, 327).

There are certainly occasions when the stronger term "alienation" seems preferable to our more descriptive word "diasporic," and when the eventual location seems ludicrously inappropriate. On occasion the sense of alienation may be expressed by reference to the author's presumed view of the location. Visitors to the Berg Collection, for example, used to be told how much Virginia Woolf would have hated the idea of her archives being held in New York.

"Diasporic," then, is a more general and sometimes more neutral term than "displaced" or "alienated." The stronger terms raise the sensitive and highly charged question of "archival return." Algeria wants its historic archives back; Ramchand feels that V. S. Naipaul's papers should be where they naturally belong, in Trinidad not in Oklahoma. Archival return, however, is extremely rare, primarily because of fear of precedent. If the principle of cultural return became enshrined in ethical cultural best practice (or even law), what would happen to the most important collections of the British Museum or the Ashmolean? To date, the only literary examples of archival return or archival rehousing have come in cases where the original location was based on deposit rather than ownership.

Archival return, however, is a topic which should remain on agendas for future discussion, within a context of the wider ethics of acquisition. The International Council on Archives, like most international bodies with membership in most of the world's 200 or so countries, is extremely reluctant to intervene in cross-boundary issues, or even to comment upon them, but nonetheless has a clear responsibility to provide a forum for continuing discussion about the ethics of displaced archives, alienated archives, and archival return.

Finale

The essays in this volume have ranged the world, to bring together examples and case studies from England and Scotland, Italy, Portugal, Turkey, Canada, the USA, Australia, Brazil, Colombia, India, Syria, the Republic of Congo, Madagascar, Mali, Namibia, Vietnam, Haiti, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, and many other countries.

They have also moved beyond literary archives to show how our key themes of diaspora and location extend into areas of business archives (in Andrew Nash's insightful essay about publishers' archives); the archives of translation (in Serenella Zanotti's detailed review of the work of Anthony Burgess); and then the universal dimension as represented by UNESCO (described by the UNESCO Archivist, Jens Boel), and the contentious issues of archives at risk, archival ethics, principles for access to archives, and human rights as a key archival issue (magisterially outlined for us by the leading author in this field, Trudy Huskamp Peterson).

Several essays scrutinize the special and distinctive nature of literary manuscripts, within these wider contexts. The workings of printers and publishers are central to this analysis, and their activities naturally vary from country to country. One of the regular laments of literary authors encountered during the Network's archival work in Namibia was the absence of a thriving publishing business in the country. If there is no significant publishing industry, what then are the implications for literary manuscripts? As Sophie Heywood emphasizes in her essay, the idea that literary manuscripts can be regarded primarily as early versions of a book or a poem is culture-specific, not universal, and may not apply very well in the global south, where many authors find it much more difficult to find publishers. In these circumstances, literary manuscripts can sometimes be final and definitive versions.

Several of our authors direct our attention to the fundamental questions of what literary archives are like, what collected literary archives are for, and how this is influenced by the literary diaspora. The best scholars, critics, biographers, and textual analysts in the past one hundred years have naturally spent many hours of their lives in the archives, giving depth, original content, and texture to their studies. There may be a future in which digitization and the use of cloud storage make location a less important and less hotly debated issue, and where born-digital archives may have an existence in multiple locations. At the present time, however, archivists and scholars in the rich literary cultures of African countries, Latin American countries, and Caribbean countries in particular feel that their access to the key artefacts of their own literary patrimonies are often alienated from them, in diasporic locations far away. The Diasporic Literary Archives Network is remaining in existence in order to ensure that these issues continue to be addressed, and will welcome co-workers and future contributors in a spirit of international solidarity.

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